

## ENJOYING THE RIDE!

*By Mimi & Kim*

As we are all aware there seems to be numerous negative reports in the media of late about school bus transportation. Whether these are incidents from other states or right here in Tucson, it never seems to be a positive version toward the personnel involved. Although these occurrences receive an enormous amount of press they are not the norm. At our monthly department meeting David asked us to give him optimistic stories, accounts, anecdotes of our daily routine and interaction with our students. These were requested by the state transportation department of the Arizona school districts transportation directors. They too see the need for positive input.

With Kim's help we came up with more stories and situations than can be counted here. We thought about the last eleven years we have worked together and as we reminisced we realized how much more we all are than just bus drivers and bus aides. We are parents, friends, teachers, nurses, confidants, and therapists, Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, policemen and even the lost & found but we are always professionals.

Most students like their teachers, some become very close to one or two throughout their education experience. They might have the same teacher for 2 years in elementary but most of the time it is only for one year. Many of the bus drivers have driven the same route for numerous years and have watched countless children grow from kindergarten to high school graduation. That driver is the first person associated with the district that the children see in the morning and the last one in the afternoon. They see these kids every school day for years. The drivers know their students names and become one of their friends. Someone they can count on for a smile, a pat on the back or to just give them a shoulder or an ear when needed. An adult in their life who isn't a parent or a teacher just someone they can talk to.

Then one day you get a new kindergartener and the parent says to you "Do you remember me? You were my bus driver!" For some of these kids you are part of the family. We have been invited to birthday parties and graduations and we love to go because they have become one of

"our kids". A 6<sup>th</sup> grader got on the bus one day dressed up so nice and as we left his stop he told us he had forgotten to ask his mother for \$1 for his field trip that day to see the symphony. You know when he got to school he had his \$1 and he was so grateful. We have loaned our high school kids money for a hot cup of coffee on a cold day. You get to know the ones who could use a little help in that way.

School bus drivers are the eyes and the ears of the school district outside of the school buildings. They are the first line of safety and protection for all the students. When my family moved and my sons were riding their bikes to school I didn't need to worry, the bus drivers were out there in the district keeping an eye on them for me and all the other parents. Bus drivers keep a look out throughout the district on a daily basis for anything unusual or irregular and report it over the radio to base so that the schools or sometimes even the police can be contacted. Cars with strange looking people parked near the schools, large groups of students who appear to be ready to fight and even bikes left unattended by the side of the road are just a few of the reports we hear on the radio. One time we even reported a man without any pants on driving by a school.

Many times we see a student waving at us to stop and we can usually guess they missed their bus and need a ride to school. We radio in to base and let them know we have picked up a stray student and we are taking them to school. The relief on their faces is worth the extra minute or two it takes to get them to school on time.

We have found jackets and musical instruments among other items left at bus stops. So we stop and pick them up and determine which driver has that stop and return these things to them or we contact the school and deliver it there so that whatever it might be it will get to the child who is probably worrying about losing it.

We have picked up special needs students walking down the street off campus because they had decided to "go

home". Then we call the school and tell them we have the lost child and are either bringing him back or taking him home. A parent called us one day and told us that her child had run away and she knew that we were out there on the road so she asked us to keep an eye out for him and to let her know if we saw him.

We try to help the parents sometimes by just taking a minute to let them talk because they need another adult to relate too. We give messages from the parents to the teachers and the teachers back to the parents. We make sure permission slips are signed so the kids don't miss out on field trips. One Christmas we heard from a caregiver that one of our students had been ill for most of the Christmas break and his single dad with two boys was having a hard time. We were not working but we decided that Christmas should be a happy time for kids. We went out and bought them a pizza coupon and some Christmas cookies and a new action video movie to make their Christmas a bit more cheerful. They were so grateful that someone cared and we were happy to be able to help.

We wash hands with wipes, blow noses, wipe tears and clean up other little accidents. We take care of the sick kids and make sure they see the nurse when they get to school. David tells us all the time to enjoy the ride. Well, for me & Kim we spend every day on our bus enjoying our kids and our jobs and definitely enjoying the ride.

